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NSC FOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JENDAYI FRAZER

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TAGS: [KCRM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [ASEC](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SACKING OF POLICE CHIEF BELIEVED IMMINENT

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

1.(C/NF) Summary: President Obasanjo may defuse the mounting tension within the Police Force over salary arrearages and, in the process be seen as getting a handle on the greater law-and-order crisis afflicting the country, by sacking the ineffectual Musiliu Smith, Inspector General of Police. Smith has been little more than a cipher and his removal could create room to implement much needed strategic reforms within the Nigerian Police. End Summary.

2.(C/NF) Musiliu Smith was appointed Inspector General of Police by President Obasanjo in late 1999. Smith's appointment is largely seen as political since he "jumped queue" over two more senior NPF officers to become IGP. By even the most charitable assessments, Smith's performance has been unremarkable, though he has been able to avoid any career-threatening gaffes, until now.

3.(C/NF) In a March 4 meeting with RNLEO, the Chairman of the new Police Service Commission Chief Simon Okeke disclosed that President Obasanjo has called a meeting of the National Police Council at 3:00 p.m. on March 6. The Police Council was established by the 1999 Constitution, is chaired by the President and includes: the nation's 36 governors; the Vice President; the National Security Advisor; the IGP; and the Police Service Commission Chairman. The last time the NPC met was late 1999 to appoint Smith as the new IGP. According to Okeke, the NPC should be convened to address major law and order crises or to hire/fire the Inspector General of Police; this time it appears it is being convened for both reasons, opined the PSC Chairman. Okeke showed RNLEO a copy of the President's order for the meeting and the meeting's agenda, which lists one item -- "the Administration of the Nigeria Police Force."

4.(C/NF) The January Police strike was grounded in long-standing grievances of enlisted personnel (Constables, Corporals, Sergeants and Inspectors) about unpaid salaries and allowances. Senior NPF officers, including the IGP, are aware of the deteriorating welfare of their subordinates but have been unresponsive.

5.(C/NF) In mid-January Smith dismissed reports of that strike without adequately investigating the discontent within his police ranks. Days before the rumored January 25 strike, Smith falsely assured the President there would be no strike (and therefore no need to address the strikers' grievances immediately). With that, Smith departed for the Hajj in Mecca. When the strike erupted -- albeit only in some parts of the country --- the President was caught off-guard. Obasanjo reportedly ordered Smith back to Nigeria when Smith did not fly back immediately after receiving news of the strike's outbreak.

6.(C/NF) Obasanjo felt betrayed by Smith's irresponsible behavior, according to PSC members and other Post sources. One PSC member close to Vice President Atiku Abubakar claims the VP, referring to Smith, recently stated to the PSC member; "Can you believe it? He lied to us!"

7.(C/NF) Comment: President Obasanjo is under growing political pressure to address the country's communal violence/security crisis and reform the reform-resistant Police. It appears likely the President will dismiss Smith and appoint a new IGP imminently. The dismissal of Smith within the next few days would almost certainly lower tensions within the lower ranks of the Police Force and might help to forestall the much-bruited but not definite March 11

police strike. Smith has been personally blamed for much of the NPF's failure to address the serious, long-standing grievances of enlisted personnel -- a not altogether unfair assessment though the responsibility is not his alone. But he clearly has become a liability for Obasanjo and, if our sources are reliable, has thus offended his only political patron. His sacking might also help our Police Reform activities since he is less than enthusiastic about the fundamental changes necessary for the NPF to become an asset for democratic rule in Nigeria.

Jeter